

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L NOUAKCHOTT 3154

STADIS//////////

FOR DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY NAEHER FROM AMBASSADOR

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: AFSP, ACOM, MR
SUBJECT: FOLLOW-UP ON SEPTEMBER CONSULTATIONS: WATTS: 4-HOUR
BREAK IN NOUAKCHOTT-WASHINGTON CIRCUIT

1. DURING OUR WIDE-RANGING DISCUSSION IN SEPTEMBER OF NOUAK-
CHOTT COMMUNICATIONS OPERATIONS AND REQUIREMENTS AND OF WATTS--
BACKGROUND, CURRENT OPERATIONS AND FUTURE PLANS, I RECALLED
THAT NOUAKCHOTT HAD BEEN TOTALLY CUT OFF FROM WASHINGTON
FOR SEVERAL HOURS TWICE DURING THE PRECEDING THREE OR FOUR
MONTHS. NOTING THE REMOTENESS OF NOUAKCHOTT, THE ISOLATION OF
THE AMERICAN COMMUNITY, OFFICIAL AND PRIVATE, AND THE SIMMER-
ING SAHARA GUERRILLA WAR, I OBSERVED THAT BEING CUT OFF FROM
WASHINGTON COMPLETELY FOR SEVERAL HOURS AT A TIME WAS MOST
DISTURBING. INDICATING THE TWO MAJOR OUTAGES HAD APPARENTLY
BEEN CAUSED BY A BREAKDOWN IN THE LINK BETWEEN PARIS AND BONN,
I EXPRESSED THE HOPE THAT YOU AND YOUR SKILLED COLLEAGUES
WOULD TAKE WHATEVER STEPS WERE REQUIRED TO INSURE CONTINUOUS AND
FIRST-RATE OPERATION OF ALL USG-CONTROLLED FACILITIES
AND TO ORGANIZE CONTINGENCY ALTERNATIVES FOR ANY COM-
MERCIAL LINKS WE DEPEND ON.

2. ONCE SINCE MY RETURN TO POST, WE HAVE BEEN CUT OFF FROM
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WASHINGTON BY THE SEVERING OF THE NIAMEY-PARIS COMMERCIAL LINK
BY A CARELESS BULLDOZER FOR THE BETTER PART OF ONE WHOLE
WORKING DAY. THE SUBSEQUENT DEVELOPMENT OF ALTERNATE PATHS
THROUGH THE EXISTING WATTS NET WAS THEREFORE A MOST REASSURING
AND MOST WELCOME ADDITION TO OUR COMMUNICATIONS CAPA-
BILITIES.

3. BUT THE BONN-PARIS CHOKE POINT APPARENTLY STILL EXISTS. NOUAKCHOTT (AND PRESUMABLY ALL THE OTHER US MISSIONS IN FRANCOPHONE WEST AFRICA) WAS CUT OFF FROM WASHINGTON FOR NEARLY FOUR HOURS DECEMBER 29 BECAUSE THE BONN-PARIS LINK WAS INOPERABLE. WE DISCOVERED THE CIRCUIT WAS DOWN WHEN WE CAME UP AT 0750 GMT; IT REMAINED DOWN UNTIL NEARLY 1200 GMT. WHILE WE HAVE IN THEORY AN ALTERNATE ROUTE VIA "COMMERCIAL" TELEX TO EMBASSY DAKAR AND THROUGH DAKAR TO WASHINGTON FOR EMERGENCIES, PERIODIC USE OF THIS PTT CIRCUIT INDICATES THAT QUALITY AND RELIABILITY OF THIS LINK IS UNHAPPILY PROBLEMATIC-- AND UTILIZATION OF IT IS AT THE SUFFERANCE OF THE MAURITANIAN GOVERNMENT.

4. WHILE IT IS SOMETIME RESTFUL TO BE UNAVAILABLE TO THE DEPARTMENT, BEING UNABLE TO REACH WASHINGTON IS WORRISOME. HOPE YOU CAN MAKE TIME TO TAKE A PERSONAL LOOK AT THE BONN-PARIS PROBLEM. ALL YOUR WEST AFRICAN COLLEAGUES/CLIENTS WILL BE MOST APPRECIATIVE.

HANDYSIDE

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